



THE	
NATIONAL	
ARCHIVES	

SPOTLIGHT ON

Central Office of Information
(COI): Government films

Insaf
The story of a boy
who only wanted equal opportunity

Key Stages 3-5 | Postwar 1945 - present

Video resource

ایک ایسے لڑکے کی کہانی جو صرف برابر

इन्साफ

Central Office of Information (COI): Government films

We hope you enjoyed watching our Education Service video with Sarah Castagnetti, Visual Collections Records Specialist at The National Archives looking at a document from the Central Office of Information (COI) relating to a public information film from 1971 entitled 'Insaaf', the Urdu word for 'fair play' or 'justice'.

Suitable for:

KS 3-5

Time period:

Postwar 1945 - present

[Watch video](#)¹

¹ <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/students/videos/spotlight-on/spotlight-on-government-films/>

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Video transcript

SARAH: Hello, I'm Sarah Castagnetti, a visual collections record specialist at The National Archives. We're going to look at a document from the Central Office of Information or the COI.

The documents in this collection all relate to the production of public information films, leaflets and posters from 1946 to 2012 when the COI closed. So what was the COI? Well, it was a government organisation that other departments could turn to if they wanted help in promoting new policies or laws, for example around public health or road safety.

The COI could advise on the best way to get a message across and they had connections with film and graphic design companies who they could ask to do the work. The COI collection includes a lot of visual material. This includes leaflets and posters and story boards for films, where someone sketches out different aspects of the story, a bit like a comic strip. You can also find letters and notes between the staff at the COI and the people in the other government departments discussing what sort of information campaign they should run, who it would be aimed at, what it would cost, and how long it would take. Sometimes there are detailed reports looking at the best way to reach an audience. In the files to do with films there are often early ideas for a film called treatments, scripts for the actors, and shooting scripts, which show what camera shots will be used. You won't find the actual films, though; that's because these are stored at the British Film Institute Archive, but a lot of them can be seen online on the BFI Player platform.

Before we look at our example from this collection, notice that our document has a unique reference: INF 6/1584, so we can use our catalogue to find it. Now let's take a close look at our document and work out what it's about. This is a COI film production file about a film called Insaaf. 'Insaaf' is an Urdu word which means justice or fair play. The COI was asked to make the film by the Race Relations Board which was responsible for dealing with complaints of racial discrimination.

And what about the appearance of the document? The file is contained in a sort of wallet, which has the document reference written on it. INF is at the start of the references of all the documents from the COI and the ones that start INF 6 are all film production files. So the fact that this reference starts with INF 6 tells me what kind of file I'm looking at. The document was closed until 2003, which means it wasn't available for people to look at until then, and the note 'selected by NFA' means the film was selected to be kept in the National Film Archive. If we take the wallet off, we can see a folder which also has the title 'Insaaf' in the corner.

Video transcript (cont.)

The file covers the years 1970 and 1971 when the film was made and it was produced by those working on the production of the film *Insaaf*. The file has story outlines or treatments for the film and a script in English, even though the actual film was mostly in Urdu. There's publicity material like posters and leaflets and some newspaper cuttings. There's also correspondence between the COI and the Race Relations Board about the film as the storyline developed. Production files like this were kept so that all the documentation around the development of a film could be brought together. Anyone who needed to know what was happening during the production or what else needed to be done could consult the file.

If you watch the film *Insaaf* on the BFI Player, you'll see that it's a 45 minute story featuring a South Asian family with a 16-year-old boy who suffers discrimination when he applies for a job.

MAN 1: He uh, he seems to be the sort of bloke we want.

MAN 2: Oh yes, he's fine.

MAN 1: If we can get him past the old man.

SARAH: He puts a complaint in to the Race Relations Board.

JOB CENTRE WORKER: What's the matter, have you lost a job?

CHHOTU: No sir, I haven't lost one, it's just that...just that I was turned down for one.

JOB CENTRE WORKER: Any idea why?

CHHOTU: Well...because of my colour.

JOB CENTRE WORKER: Is that what you think?

CHHOTU: Yes sir. But what do I do?

Video transcript (cont.)

JOB CENTRE WORKER: Well, you can complain.

CHHOTU: How sir?

JOB CENTRE WORKER: You fill in the form to start with. Come to think of it, most things these days begin by filling in a form.

SARAH: And ultimately, the employer admits discriminating against him and he's given compensation and offered the job.

RACE RELATIONS BOARD ASSISTANT: Mr Appleby has written to us offering you two weeks pay in lieu of what you would have earned if he'd taken you on in the first place.

CHHOTU: Two weeks pay?

RACE RELATIONS BOARD ASSISTANT: Yes, and the offer of a job after all. He'll sign an assurance of course that he won't do it again.

SARAH: Watching the film and then reading the correspondence in the production file, you can learn something about how the government was trying to address race discrimination at this time and find out about the work of the Race Relations Board. The National Archives has documents from the COI because it was a government organisation. The film production files like this one are just one part of the COI collection. Don't forget we have only looked at one document about race relations in this period of history and remember our government records are not really going to show the realities of discrimination from the point of view of British South Asians at the time. These are considerations we must bear in mind when we're trying to evaluate its significance. So this is just one of the documents to be found in our COI collection which can be used to find out more about race relations in the UK around this time.

Tasks

Watch the video then try and answer the following questions:

- What was the purpose of the Central Office of Information?
- When did it exist?
- What type of materials are included in the collections of the COI?
- What kind of material can be found which specifically relates to government films in this collection?
- Where are the original films kept which concern these documents?
- What is the code of the COI document for the film discussed in our video?
- What do the records in the file reveal about the purpose of film 'Insaaf'?

Source 1

Publicity poster used to promote the film 'Insaaf', Catalogue ref: INF 6/1584

- What does the poster infer about the story/content of the film?
- What is purpose of the main figures and those shown in the background of the poster? How are they represented?
- What persuasive techniques are used in the poster to get audiences to watch the film?
- What are the reasons suggested in the poster for the making of the film?
- How important is the language on the poster?
- Why do you think the poster was made?
- Who do you think is the intended audience for the poster?
- Does it communicate effectively with its audience?

Source 2

Film production sheet for film 'Insaaf', Catalogue ref: INF 6/1584

- What is the purpose of the film 'Insaaf' according to this film production sheet?
- What is (a) the length of the film (b) the release date of the film?
- What is the historical value of this source?

Tasks

Source 3

Extract from an early treatment describing the nature of the film 'Insaaf', Catalogue ref: INF 6/1584

Note: Our collections contain ideas, language from original records which reflect historical perspectives and attitudes of the time. Some of this language will be considered offensive. However, we think it important to show them as accurate representations of the record to help us understand the past.

- What do you understand by the term 'film treatment'?
- What in your opinion, was the thinking behind each of the points 1-6?
- How does this document help explain the story/content suggested by the film poster?
- How does this document extract relate to information provided by Source 2?

Source 4

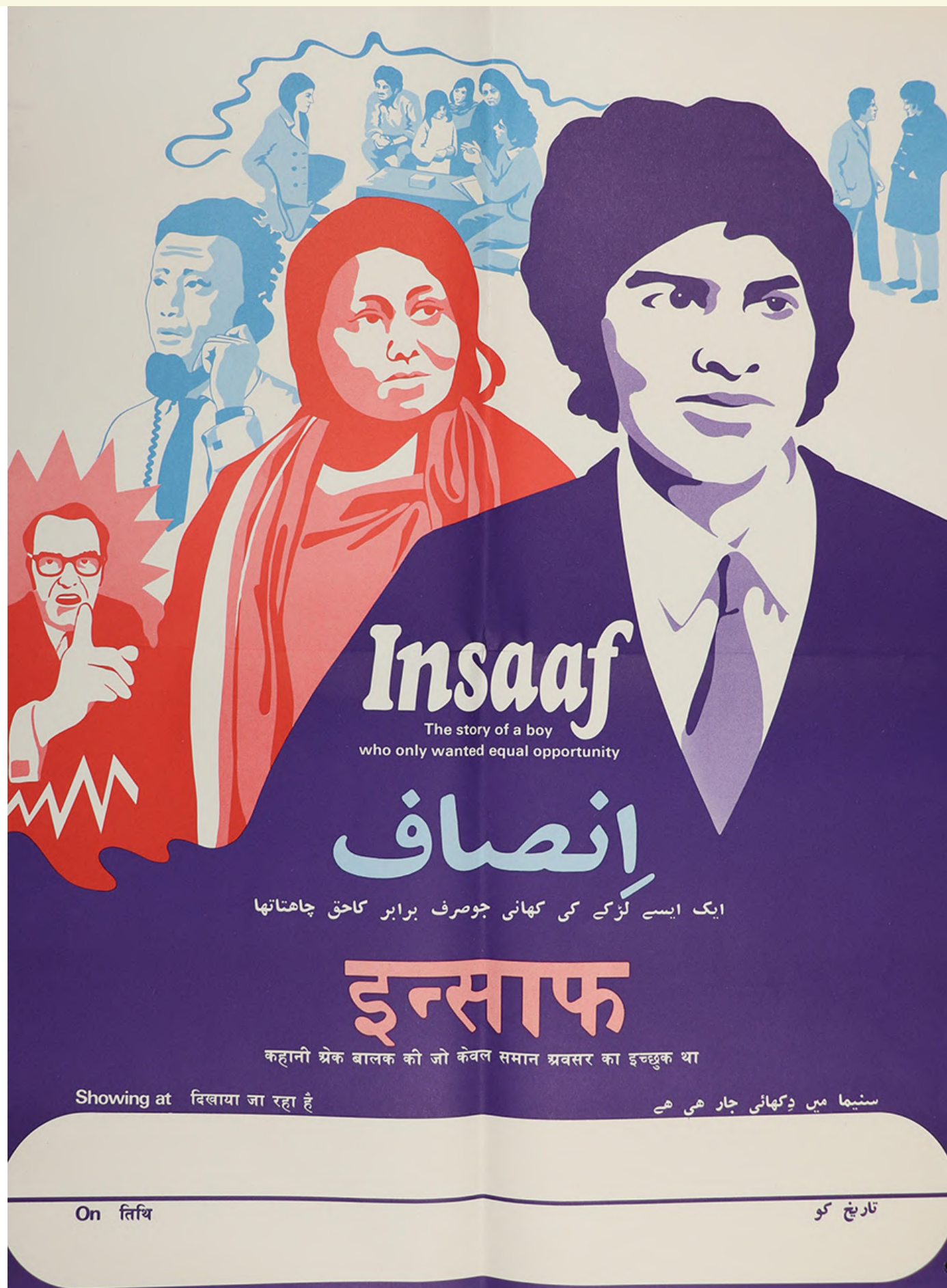
Extracts from a booklet explaining the terms of Race Relations Act and Board set up in 1968. Catalogue ref: LAB 44/286

- According to the Race Relations Act what is meant by discrimination and segregation?
- How did the Race Relations Board work and deal with complaints?
- Why do you think this booklet was produced?
- Explain how the government was trying to address racial discrimination through this legislation and the film 'Insaaf' at this time?
- What is lacking in documents 1-4 concerning the realities of discrimination for British South Asians in the 1970s?
- [Watch the film¹](https://player.bfi.org.uk/free/film/watch-insaaf-1971-online) on the British Film Institute player.

¹ <https://player.bfi.org.uk/free/film/watch-insaaf-1971-online>

Source 1: Publicity poster used to promote the film 'Insaaf'.

Catalogue Ref: INF 6/1584



Source 2: Film production sheet for film 'Insaaf'.

Catalogue Ref: INF 6/1584

Department CENTRAL OFFICE OF INFORMATION		No. 974	
<i>Particulars of Cinematograph Film for information of Public Record Office</i> (Records Administration Division)			
1. Title INSAAF			
2. No. of reels, 4½ - 43 mins 5.4 secs or length of film in feet 3,879ft x 35mm - 1,182.3 1,551.6ft x 16mm - 473.1 metres (metres)		3. Sound or silent Sound	
4. Black and white or coloured Technicolor	5. Description of negative, fine-grain or other master material available 35mm cut Eastmancolor original neg.		
6. Is a projection copy available in— (a) 35 mm? Yes (b) 16 mm? ---		7. Date when taken on charge 15 July 1971	
8. Division or Branch responsible Race Relations Board			
9. Departmental Catalogue No. MI 1545 FL 3653		10. Whether or not security-classified NOT	
11. Nature of subject matter, if not clearly indicated by Title		Aimed at immigrants living in the UK this film seeks through its dramatic story content to make such audiences aware of the Race Relations Act and to create a wider understanding of its provisions and purposes. The film has an English and Urdu sound-track.	
12. Any known production details (e.g. producer, director, date of production)		James Archibald & Associates for C O I Director: Robert Giles Producer: James Archibald	
13. Any point of interest appearing to justify consideration for permanent preservation by Public Record Office		YES NFA.	
14. Additional remarks (e.g. as to condition of old film if so bad as to appear unfit for preservation)			

Source 2: Transcript

Particulars of Cinematograph Film for information of Public Record Office
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2. No of reels 4½ – 43 mins. 5.4 secs. or length of film in feet: 3,879 ft x 35mm- 1,182.3 metres 1,551.6 ft x 16mm-473.1 metres

3. Sound or silent: Sound

4. Black and White or coloured Technicolor

5. Description of negative, fine grain or other master material available. 35mm cut Eastmancolor original neg.

6. Is a projection copy available in (a) 35 mm (b) 16 mm: Yes

7. Date when taken on charge: 15 July 1971

8. Division or Branch responsible: Race Relations Board

9. Departmental Catalogue no. MI 1545: FL 3653

10. Whether or not security-classified: NOT

11. Nature of subject matter, if not clearly indicated by Title: Aimed at immigrants living in the UK this film seeks through its dramatic story content to make such audiences aware of the Race Relations Act and to create a wider understanding of its provisions and purposes. The film has an English and Urdu soundtrack.

12. Any known production details (e.g. Producer, director, date of production): James Archibald & Associates for COI. Director: Robert Giles. Producer: James Archibald

Source 2: Transcript (cont.)

13. Any point of interest appearing to justify consideration for permanent preservation by

Public Record Office: Yes NFA

14. Additional remarks (e.g. as to condition of old film if so bad, as to appear unfit for preservation)

Source 3: Extract from an early treatment describing the nature of the film 'Insaaf'. Catalogue Ref: INF 6/1584

Such a film ,carefully and unambiguously handled, would obviously be of value in guiding the coloured immigrant.

The greatest care and most deliberate thought is necessary to avoid giving such immigrants the impression that they have carte blanche to harass employers and to claim immediate privilege because of their colour.

The evident danger of ambiguity of presentation and misinterpretation leads one to cling doggedly to the fact that the subject of this film is fraught with the ease with which it could become a propaganda weapon for the Black Power-minded, or the gullible and easily misled among the inexperienced and less-skilled immigrants seeking work.

That the Race Relations Act is being actively misused and misinterpreted by coloured immigrants is shown by the Reports of Case Histories and the periodic Analyses issued by the Board.

The immigrant watching the film must, above all, be clearly aware that the facilities of the Board will not, and cannot

1. Give him the entré into a firm because he is coloured and applying for a position in that firm.
2. Ensure he gets a job just because he wants it.
3. Compensate for any skills or experience he lacks.
4. Compensate for any deficiencies, lack or weakness in his character, ie make him eligible for a position although his qualifications are not up to the employer's desired standards.
5. Give him priority over other applicants.
6. Make him something he is not.

Source 3: Transcript

Such a film, carefully and unambiguously handled, would obviously be of value in guiding the coloured immigrant.

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5. Give him priority over other applicants.
6. Make him something he is not.

Source 4a: Extract 1: Booklet explaining the terms of Race Relations Act and Board set up in 1968. Catalogue Ref: LAB 44/286

The Race Relations Act 1968

Discrimination and segregation

The Act defines discrimination as treating a person less favourably than another person on grounds of colour, race, or ethnic or national origins in the provision to the public of goods, facilities and services, and in employment and housing.

Discrimination includes segregating people on grounds of colour, race, or ethnic or national origins.

Throughout this booklet 'discriminate' and 'discrimination' are used in that sense.

Goods, facilities and services

It is unlawful to discriminate in the provision to the public, or a section of the public, of any goods, facilities or services. Examples are given of such facilities and services. They include:

access to, and use of, any place which members of the public are permitted to enter

facilities for entertainment, recreation, refreshment, transport or travel

accommodation in a hotel, boarding house or similar establishment

facilities for education, instruction or training

facilities for banking, insurance, grants, loans, credits or finance

the services of any business, profession, trade, local or public authority

These are given as *examples* only.

Employment

It is unlawful for an employer or anyone concerned with the employment of others to discriminate against a person by refusing to employ him for work which is available and for which he is qualified, or by refusing him the same terms and conditions of work which are available to others having the

Source 4a: Transcript

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...

The Public Service

Government departments are also bound by the Act.

Advertisements and notices

It is unlawful to publish or display discriminatory advertisements or notices, even if the act to which the advertisement or notice applies is not itself unlawful under the Act.

Incitement etc.

It is unlawful deliberately to aid, induce or incite another person to discriminate unlawfully.

Incitement to racial hatred (as distinct from unlawful discrimination) may be a criminal offence but is not within the jurisdiction of the Race Relations Board. It is a matter for the Police and the Attorney General.

Complaints

Complaints of discrimination must be made within two months of the act complained of. They will be investigated by a conciliation committee, or by the Race Relations Board.

Employment complaints are dealt with in the next section.

If, after investigation, the Board or committee forms an opinion that there has been unlawful discrimination it must try to get a voluntary settlement of the differences between the parties. It must also, where appropriate, try to get a written assurance against further discrimination.

Source 4b: Transcript

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The Race Relations Board

Functions and powers

The function of the Race Relations Board is to secure compliance with the Act.

In the first instance the Board endeavours to resolve complaints by conciliation. Only when conciliation has failed does the Board seek proceedings in court.

Under the Act certain changes have been made in the Board's composition and powers, including the new power, already mentioned, to take cases to the courts and to seek injunctions and damages. Further, though the Board will continue to work through its conciliation committees, it can, if it wishes, investigate complaints itself. It can also initiate investigations where no complaint has been made.

Conciliation committees

Conciliation is central to the work of the Board and its conciliation committees. These committees cover the whole of Great Britain. Their addresses and telephone numbers are given at the back of this booklet.

Committee members serve on a voluntary basis and are appointed in a personal capacity. They do not represent any particular organisation or group but, collectively, they are able to deal constructively with the problems brought before them.

Conciliation committees are assisted by full-time conciliation officers.

Investigation and conciliation

There are two stages in dealing with complaints: investigation and conciliation.

First, the Board or committee must, by investigation, form an opinion that unlawful discrimination has occurred. Only then does the Board or committee try to secure a settlement of the differences between the complainant and the discriminator and an assurance from the discriminator about his future conduct.

Only where it has not been possible to achieve a settlement and assurance, or where an assurance against future discrimination has been broken, can the Board decide to take court proceedings.

Source 4c: Transcript

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Complaints

Who can complain

A person who believes he, or she, has been unlawfully discriminated against can complain. Or someone can complain on their behalf.

How to complain

A complaint can be made in writing, or by word of mouth.

When to complain

A complaint must normally be made within two months of the act complained of, but complaints are best dealt with if they are made quickly.

Where to complain

A complaint should be made to the nearest conciliation committee or direct to the Race Relations Board. Employment complaints may also be made to an Employment Exchange.

Complaints made on behalf of another person

Anyone complaining on behalf of another person must have that person's authority to do so, in writing.

Source 4d: Transcript

Complaints

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Why do our hyperlinks come with footnotes?

Our resources are designed to be printed and used in classrooms, which means hyperlinks aren't always accessible digitally. We include the full link at the bottom of the page so that you can type in the address without distracting from the main text of the lesson materials.

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Our [Onsite Workshops](#) are available for free here at The National Archives and allow students to experience genuine original documents reflecting over 1000 years of history. From Elizabeth I's signature to the telegrams of the sinking Titanic, students love the wow-factor of being able to see real history on the desk in front of them.

Our [Online Workshops](#) allow our Education Officers to teach through your projector, leading discussions and guiding students through activities based around original documents. All you need is a computer with a projector, webcam and microphone. We'll arrange a test call before your session to check the tech is working.

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